

Obey the Lord

Key Verse: “*Then came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet, saying, Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste?*”
—*Haggai 1:3,4*

Selected Scripture:
Haggai 1:1-11

WHEN GOD MADE A COVENANT with Israel by delivering the Ten Commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai, he told them they were to worship him only. If they obeyed the covenant given to them, God promised to bless them above all the nations of the earth. To these instructions “all the people answered together, and said, All that the LORD hath spoken we will do.”—Exod. 19:8

It was not long, however, until Israel’s promised obedience was broken. When Moses was delayed coming down from the mount while speaking with God, the people implored Aaron to make them new gods. Aaron was persuaded to build a golden calf, to which the people said, “These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought us up out of the land of Egypt.” (Exod. 32:1-4) Thus began a recurring pattern of disobedience by Israel in keeping their promise to worship only the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the God which performed miracles in delivering them from Egyptian bondage—the God who chose them from all the nations of the earth to be his people.

God gave Israel a series of strong warnings that the worship of other gods would result in their promised land being taken from them and the people being scattered

among the heathen nations. In the fourth chapter of Deuteronomy, Moses became the first of many prophets to warn Israel of the punishment that would result from their failure to obey God's commandments. It was the Prophet Jeremiah who later told Israel that after so many instances of disobedience God would take away their kingdom and give them into captivity in Babylon.

Along with this punishment, however, came a promise from God that he would visit them after seventy years and cause them to return to Jerusalem. (Jer. 29:10) As always, God kept his promise. First, he lifted up Cyrus as king of Persia and gave him all of the kingdoms of the earth. This was in accordance with Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream that another would take power from Babylon. Cyrus acknowledged God's hand in giving him the kingdoms of the earth. When he was charged to build God a house in Jerusalem, Cyrus obeyed and made a proclamation that the Israelites should be allowed to return to Jerusalem to do so.—Ezra 1:1-3

The Israelites gladly received this news. Many quickly returned and built the foundation of the Temple with singing and praise for their God. (chap. 3:10,11) However, when adversaries arose to hinder the work, the people quickly turned from building the Temple to building homes for themselves. Once again, they failed to maintain obedience to the instructions of their God. Many years passed with no further rebuilding of the Temple. It was then that the Lord sent the Prophet Haggai to speak the words of our Key Verse to the people.

What a striking lesson we can gain from this message delivered by Haggai. Do we sometimes allow our desire for earthly treasures to interfere with our obedience to God's will? Let us rather heed the words of our Master: "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."—Matt. 6:20,21 ■